



PRESS RELEASE
*Office of the United States Attorney
Middle District of Florida*

**PAUL I. PEREZ
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY**

400 North Tampa Street
Suite 3200
Tampa, Florida 33602
813/274-6000
813/274-6300 (Fax)

300 North Hogan Street, Suite 700
Post Office Box 600
Jacksonville, Florida 32201
904/301-6300
904/301-6310 (Fax)

80 North Hughey Avenue,
Room 201
Orlando, Florida 32801
407/648-7500
407/648-7643 (Fax)

2110 First Street,
Suite 3-137
Fort Myers, Florida 33901
239/461-2200
239/461-2219 (fax)

Contact: Steve Cole ♦ Public Affairs Specialist ♦ 813/274-6352

For Immediate Release

April 15, 2003

**WOMAN SENTENCED TO PRISON FOR HEALTH CARE FRAUD
IN OPERATION HARDCORE**

TAMPA - Federal authorities announced that late yesterday afternoon, April 14, 2003, Teresa Martinez of Safety Harbor, Florida, was sentenced in federal court in Tampa for her role in a scheme to defraud the Medicare and Medicaid programs. She was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge James D. Whittemore to a prison term of fifty-one months, to be followed by three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay restitution of \$2,579,069 to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The court also entered a \$372,877.52 order of forfeiture against the defendant. On January 30, 2003, a federal jury in Tampa found Martinez guilty of one count of conspiracy to commit Medicare and Medicaid fraud, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 371, and four counts of submitting false claims to the Medicare and Medicaid programs, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 287.

Martinez was charged in January 2002 by a federal grand jury in multiple counts of a 55-count Indictment relating to a massive scheme to defraud the Medicare and Medicaid programs. The Indictment alleged that Martinez, along with seven other individuals and six corporations, conspired and schemed to submit false, fictitious and fraudulent claims to the Medicare and Medicaid programs in connection with the sale of durable medical equipment ("DME") such as motorized wheelchairs, alternating pressure mattresses, and

related items. The charges against her related primarily to her role in the conspiracy as a sales representative for a group of companies commonly known as "Gold Star," which, according to the Indictment, were run by Barry Douglas Haught, Ernest L. Sleeth, and others. Haught was sentenced on March 18, 2003 to a prison term of seven years, to be followed by three years of supervised release, and ordered to pay restitution of \$14,445,429 to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

The investigation has also netted guilty pleas from Barry Douglas Haught of Tampa, Ernest L. Sleeth of Dover, Phillip Lipsey of Orlando, James Taylor of Georgia, Dennis E. Rodriguez of Odessa, John C. Merlino of Tampa, John S. Bidelsbach, D.P.M., of Palm Harbor, Fred D. Ford, Jr., of Tampa, Renee LaChance Hunter Livio of Spring Hill, Cherry E. Moody of Tampa, Christopher C. Stursberg of Wesley Chapel, and Thomas W. Nespeca of Tampa, along with DME companies DBB, Inc., G.S. Care Corp., Gold Star Healthcare, Inc., Med-Care Distributors, Inc., T-Tech Medical Services, Inc., Trans-Capital Investment Group, Inc., Nursery Road Villa, Duramed, Inc., Medmaster Services, Inc., and Gold Star Medical Services, Inc., and Fulcrum Services, Inc., and Birotech Corporation, two companies that were created solely to facilitate other aspects of the fraudulent schemes.

The ongoing investigation leading to the pleas and convictions, dubbed "Operation Hardgear," is being conducted jointly by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Office of the Inspector General of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit of the Florida Attorney General's Office, and the Internal Revenue Service. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Terry A. Zitek and Jay G. Trezevant.